

The Dead Poets Society Movie Supplement

By Tracee Orman

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Poetry Resources Bundle
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DEAD POETS SOCIETY - SUPPLEMENT TO MOVIE

Carpe Diem! Seize the Day!

SETTING

1959-1960 Welton Academy, Vermont (All boys school) Four Pillars: Tradition, Honor, Discipline, Excellence (*a.k.a. Travesty, Horror, Decadence, Excrement*)

***In a dictionary, look up the words travesty, horror, decadence, & excrement.**

CHARACTERS

The Boys: Neil Perry, Todd Anderson, Charlie Dalton (a.k.a. Nuwanda), Knox Overstreet, Steven Meeks, Gerard Pitts, Richard Cameron; Chet Danburry. **The Girls:** Chris Noel, Ginny Danburry.

Teachers/Parents: Mr. John Keating, Mr. McAllistar, Mr. Nolan, Mr. Perry (Neil's Dad).

"No matter what anybody tells you, words and ideas can change the world."

O Captain, My Captain

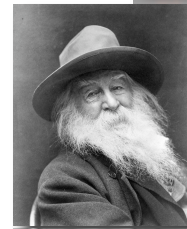
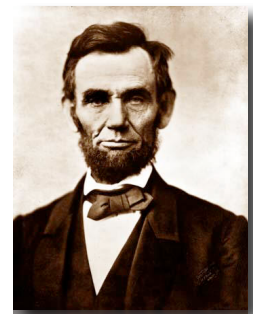
By Walt Whitman

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done;
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up - for you the flag is flung - for you the bugle trills;
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths - for you the shores a-crowding;
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head;
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;
From fearful trip, the victor ship, comes in with object won;
Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!
But I, with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

This poem was written for the death of Abraham Lincoln in 1865. Published to immediate acclaim in the New York City Saturday Press, "O Captain! My Captain!" was widely anthologized during his lifetime. In the 1880s, when Whitman gave public lectures and readings, he was asked to recite the poem so often that he said: "I'm almost sorry I ever wrote it," though it had "certain emotional immediate reasons for being."



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To the Virgins, Make Much of Time

By Robert Herrick (1591-1634)

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old time is still a-flying,
And this same flower that smiles today,
To-morrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer,
But being spent, the worse and worst
Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,
and while ye may, go marry,
For having lost just once your prime,
You may for ever tarry.

As they are looking at the trophy cabinet...

• Mr. Keating says, "They believe they're destined for great things, just like many of you, their eyes are full of hope, just like you. Did they wait until it was too late to make from their lives even one iota of what they were capable? Because, you see gentlemen, these boys are now fertilizing daffodils. But if you listen real close, you can hear them whisper their legacy to you. Go on, lean in. Listen, you hear it? - - Carpe - - hear it? - - Carpe, carpe diem, seize the day boys, make your lives extraordinary."

Rip! Rip! Keep Ripping!

• Mr. Keating says, "We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion. And medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for."

O Me! O Life!

By Walt Whitman

O ME! O life!... of the questions of these recurring;
Of the endless trains of the faithless--of cities fill'd with the foolish;
Of myself forever reproaching myself, (for who more foolish than I, and who more faithless?)
Of eyes that vainly crave the light--of the objects mean--of the struggle ever renew'd;
Of the poor results of all--of the plodding and sordid crowds I see around me;
Of the empty and useless years of the rest--with the rest me intertwined;
The question, O me! so sad, recurring--What good amid these, O me, O life?

Answer.

That you are here--that life exists, and identity;
That the powerful play goes on, and you will contribute a verse.
(From *Leaves of Grass*, 1891)

• **Mr. Keating says,** "To quote from Whitman, 'O me! O life!... of the questions of these recurring; of the endless trains of the faithless... of cities filled with the foolish; what good amid these, O me, O life? Answer. That you are here - that life exists, and identity; that the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse.'"
That the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse. What will your verse be?"

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FIVE CENTURIES OF VERSE...THE REBIRTH OF THE DEAD POETS SOCIETY

The boys read from the book *The Five Centuries of Verse* at every Dead Poet's society meeting. The first quote they would open up with is from the writer Henry David Thoreau. He wrote a book called *Walden* while living on Walden pond in Massachusetts for two years.

I went into the woods because I wanted to live deliberately. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life...to put to rout all that was not life; and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

~Henry David Thoreau (1847)

Cursed be the social wants that sin against the strength of youth!

Cursed be the social lies that wrap us from the living truth!

- Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Locksley Hall" (1835)

Excerpt from Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses" (1833)

...Come, my friends,

'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.

... for my purpose holds

To sail beyond the sunset,

... and though

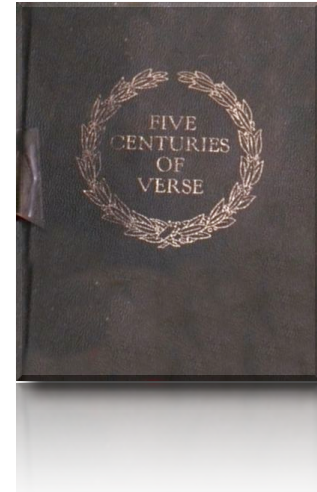
We are not now that strength which in old days

Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;

One equal temper of heroic hearts,

Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.



Looking From Another Point Of View...

KEATING: (*He leaps onto his desk.*) "Why do I stand up here? I stand upon my desk to remind myself that we must constantly look at things in a different way. You see, the world looks different from up here... Just when you think you know something, you have to look at in another way. Even though it may seem silly or wrong, you must try! Now when you read, don't just consider only what the author thinks. Consider what *you* think. Boys, you must strive to find your own voice. Because the longer you wait to begin, the less likely you are to find it at all. Thoreau said, 'Most men lead lives of quiet desperation.' Don't be resigned to that. Break out! Don't just walk off the ledge like lemmings. Look around you."

ALWAYS STRIVE TO BE YOURSELF...EVEN IN THE FACE OF DISAPPROVAL OF OTHERS

Soccer Poetry...

"Oh to struggle against great odds. To meet enemies undaunted." (Pitts)

"To be a sailor of the world, bound for all ports." (Boy 1)

"Oh, I live to be the ruler of life, not a slave." (Boy 2)

"To mount the scaffolds. To advance to the muzzle of guns with perfect nonchalance." (Boy 3)

"To dance, clap hands, exalt, shout, skip, roll on, float on." (Meeks)

"Oh, to have life henceforth the poem of new joys." (Hopkins)

"To indeed be a god!" (Charlie)

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POEMS THE BOYS WROTE...



Knox's poem "To Chris"

I see a sweetness in her smile.
Bright light shines from her eyes.
But life is complete; contentment is mine,
Just knowing that she's alive.

The heavens made a girl named Chris
With hair and skin of gold.
To touch her would be paradise.

Hopkin's poem...

The cat
sat on
the mat.



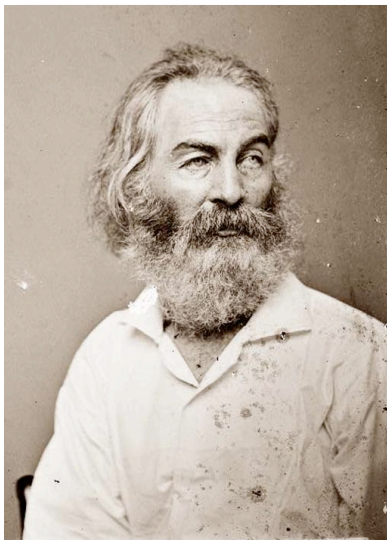
Keating's response to Hopkin's poem: *Congratulations, Mr. Hopkins. Yours is the first poem to ever have a negative score on the Pritchard scale. We're not laughing at you, we're laughing near you. I don't mind that your poem had a simple theme. Sometimes the most beautiful poetry can be about simple things, like a cat, or a flower or rain.*

You see, poetry can come from anything with the stuff of revelation in it. Just don't let your poems be ordinary. Now, who's next?

Todd's poem...

I close my eyes.
And this image floats beside me.
A sweaty-toothed madman with a stare
that pounds my brain.
His hands reach out and choke me.
And all the time he's mumbling.
"Truth. Truth is like
a blanket that always leaves your feet
cold."

You push it, stretch it, it'll
never be enough. You kick at it, beat it,
it'll never cover any of us.
From the moment we enter crying
to the moment
we leave dying,
it will just cover your
face as you wail
and cry
and scream.



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KEATING ON CONFORMITY...

"...We all have a great need for acceptance. But you must trust that your beliefs are unique, your own, even though others may think them odd or unpopular, even though the herd may go, 'That's baaaaad.' Robert Frost said, *'Two roads diverged in a wood and I, I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.'*

Now, I want you to find your own walk right now. Your own way of striding, pacing. Any direction. Anything you want. Whether it's proud, whether it's silly, anything. Gentlemen, the courtyard is yours."

The Road Not Taken

By Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
(1920)

THE DEAD POETS SOCIETY MEETING...

"Nuwanda" quotes from Shakespeare's
& Byron's poems

Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?

By William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

She walks in beauty, like the night

By Lord Byron

SHE walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies,
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meets in her aspect and her eyes;
Thus mellow'd to that tender light
Which Heaven to gaudy day denies.

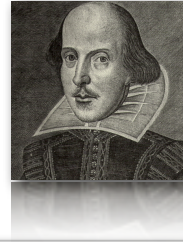
One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impair'd the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress
Or softly lightens o'er her face,
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

And on that cheek and o'er that brow
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,—
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent.

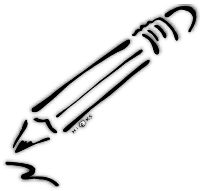
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Neil's last lines (the play's epilogue) in Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream":

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumber'd here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do no reprehend;
If you pardon, we will mend;
And, as I am an honest Puck,
If we have unearned luck
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,
We will make amends ere long;
Else the Puck a liar call;
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.



Puck apologizes to the audience for anything that might have offended them and suggests that they pretend it was a dream. This monologue directly addresses the audience and ties them in to the play.



THE DEAD POETS SOCIETY, THE NEXT DAY...

Write what happens in the sequel to the movie. What does the future hold for Mr. Keating and the boys?



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DEAD POET'S SOCIETY MOVIE QUESTIONS

Using the movie supplement handout, answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper:

1. Mr. Keating uses the poem "To the Virgins, Make Most of Time" to teach the boys to "sieve the day" (carpe diem). Why would he use this poem? (p. 2)
2. He tells the boys that we read and write poetry "...because we are members of the human race." What does he mean by this? Read the entire quote and explain in your own words. (p. 2)
3. Read Walt Whitman's poem titled "O Me! O Life!" and Mr. Keating's quote following the poem (p. 2). If "the powerful play" is a metaphor for life, then what is meant by "...and you may contribute a verse."?
4. Translate, in your own words, what Thoreau's quote beginning, "I went into the woods..." means (p. 3).
5. Translate, in your own words, what Tennyson's quote from "Locksley Hall" means (p. 3).
6. Read the poem Todd "writes" in class with Mr. Keating's help (p. 4). Todd uses a simile in the first stanza. What is it & what are the two things being compared?
7. In Todd's second stanza, what is "it"?
8. Re-read Todd's poem and as you read the second stanza, replace all the "it"s with what you wrote for #7. What is Todd's message, or the meaning, of this poem?
9. Define the word "conform" (as in "conformity").
10. In what ways is conformity a good thing? Give examples.
11. Mr. Keating says, "We all have a great need for acceptance..." Read the rest of his quote (p. 5). What type or example of conformity is he trying to get the boys to break away from? Is this a positive lesson? Why or why not?
12. Answer 12a. if you were present the day this part was shown in class. Answer 12b. if you were absent the day this was shown in class.
 - a. Read Neil's last lines of the play "A Midsummer Night's Dream" by William Shakespeare (p. 6). Who in the audience is Neil directing toward and what is he trying to say to that person?
 - b. Read Neil's last lines of the play "A Midsummer Night's Dream" by William Shakespeare (p. 6). What is the character Puck saying to the audience?
13. Would you want Mr. Keating as an English teacher? Why or why not?
14. Answer 14a. if you were present the day this part was shown in class. Answer 14b. if you were absent the day this was shown in class.
 - a. Who is responsible for the tragedy? Why?
 - b. Read Hopkin's poem (p. 4) and Mr. Keating's response. What does he mean by "...poetry can come from anything with the stuff of revelation in it"?
15. The Dead Poet's Society...*The Next Day*
Pretend you have a very important meeting tomorrow with a Hollywood producer who wants to hear your idea for a sequel to Dead Poet's Society. Write up an idea for a sequel and give details as to what has happened (and will happen) with atleast 5 of the characters.

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Answer the following questions while watching the movie:

1. What does “Carpe Diem” mean? Why does Mr. Keating tell his students this?

2. According to John Keating (the English teacher), why do we study poetry?

3. What is the Dead Poet’s Society?

4. Where does the Dead Poet’s Society meet?

5. What does Neal want to do that his father will most likely disapprove of?

6. Which play is being performed at Henley Hall? Who wrote it?

7. Who is Knox infatuated with? _____
Who is she dating? _____
8. Mr. Keating says, “Just don’t let your poems be _____.”
9. Who is the poet Mr. Keating uses to help Todd write his poem? (Hint: He’s the sweaty-toothed mad-man in the picture)

10. What instrument does Charlie play at one of the Dead Poet’s Society meetings?

11. What poem does Mr. Keating use to make his point about everyone being different (when they were walking in the courtyard)? Who wrote the poem?

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12. What do Todd's parents give him for his birthday (again)? _____
What do he and Neal do with it?

13. What is Charlie's new name (instead of Charles Dalton)?

14. What type of punishment does Charlie, or Nuwanda, get for putting the letter to the editor in the newspaper (as well as his "It's God calling" stunt)?

15. What does Mr. Keating think the purpose of education is?

16. "There is a time for daring, there is a time for _____," said Mr. Keating.
17. Why does Neal go to Mr. Keating for help? _____

18. Do you think Mr. Keating is at fault for the tragedy? Why or why not? Explain...

